

# **PR-SPAN's Science Rising Initiative to Bring Visibility and Awareness in Puerto Rico's Election Cycle** <sup>[1]</sup>

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Puerto Rico has been immersed in a constant recovery cycle over recent years. Disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and the one we are experiencing now with the COVID-19 pandemic, make evident the underlying inequities and social and political dynamics that perpetuate the vulnerability of the Puerto Rican people. Facing the disproportionate effects of climate change and with climate extremes upon us, coupled with the current social and political crisis we are

experiencing, it is important that policymaking be centered on scientific evidence and equity. Thus, the Puerto Rico Science Policy Action Network (PR-SPAN), a Ciencia Puerto Rico initiative, has the objective of raising visibility and awareness with science (conCiencia) by bringing often-unnoticed topics to the public discussion in this election cycle in Puerto Rico.

PR-SPAN aims to be a platform where Puerto Ricans from different backgrounds interested in science policy can acquire resources, and further develop their skill sets, to bring their knowledge to the policymaking arenas. Since the onset of the pandemic, PR-SPAN and Ciencia PR have been working together to draw attention to the lack of evidence-based decision-making in the governmental pandemic response. Furthermore, we have worked to provide scientific and culturally-appropriate information to the public on several issues regarding COVID-19. Under the leadership of Dr. Mónica Feliú Mójer, Ciencia PR and PR-SPAN have facilitated over 150 Op-Eds and interviews to different news outlets in Puerto Rico and the US. We have publicly advocated for the inclusion of science in the governmental response, and have also collaborated with the International Network for Government Science Advice in New Zealand in their COVID-19 policy tracking initiative. Thanks to the grant we received from the Union of Concerned Scientists' Science Rising initiative, we are able to continue these actions, and catalyze new ones.

Our Science Rising initiative, Visibilidad y conCiencia en Puerto Rico de cara a las elecciones 2020, has the following objectives: (1) bring to the public discussion important topics to address the COVID-19 pandemic and emergency management, (2) motivate Puerto Ricans to vote in November, and inform the public on the new regulations under the recently enacted Electoral Law, (3) interview the gubernatorial candidates, and, finally, (4) develop communication pieces around the newly elected legislature (2021-2024), and share with the new legislators resources for direct access to Puerto Rican scientists.

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